3) M.V. Silvercove (Silverline) 12842 GRT 8400 BHP R/O New York 14/6/68 – 31/12/68 Baltimore.
4) M.V. Silvercove (Silverline) Re-signed on articles. R/O Baltimore 1/1/69 - 24/7/69 Boston.

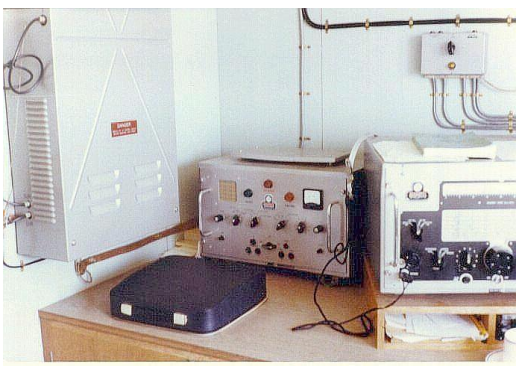
U.S. East-Coast - Panama - Japan/S.Korea (Pusan) - Vancouver/Victoria – Panama –US East-Coast.

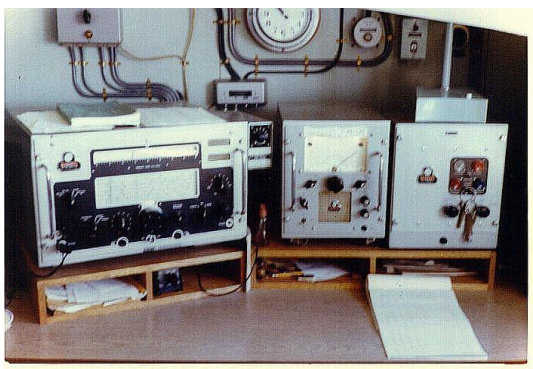
It was the first trip on my own, as now I was a fully qualified chief (and only) radio officer, as well as being my first trans-Atlantic flight from Heathrow to New York to join. I had butterflies in my stomach and a bad case of nerves! What would I find and how would I get on?

I found that this was a relatively new ship, but very Spartan in its furnishings. Cabin panelling was Formica, virtually no carpets, and only the basic necessities fitted in the cabins. Some of the furniture was of steel, with plastic upholstery – very uncomfortable in hot weather. No real attention had been made to comfort, everything was very utilitarian. The most comfortable place to read or relax was my bed! I was disappointed, but had to make the best of it.

The Silvercove was one of the new breed of ships. Built cheaply in Japan, with minimum standards for the crew accommodation. Many new ships had the "all Aft" accommodation design, to maximise the cargo space. One of the disadvantages however of the "all Aft" design, particularly with motor ships, was vibration. On the Silvercove, the formica panels in the cabins used to squeak loudly when the ship vibrated, and we all had bits of paper stuffed into various joints to keep them quiet!

All accommodation was above the screw and engine which caused considerable vibration and noise problems, especially when light ship. The radio equipment was also minimum standards, with a Marconi Oceanspan 7 (with a





maximum of 100 watts output) and the Atalanta receiver. The usual Marconi auxiliaries rack with the Salvor emergency transmitter and Monitor emergency receiver. The low transmitter power made it very difficult to communicate back to Portishead Radio, the main UK communications point, especially from the Pacific. Despite this, I think I never needed another ship to QSP (relay free of charge) for me. The so-called "British Area Scheme" was still in use, so I could use some of the Naval facilities in various parts of the world to relay my traffic to the UK without cost.

The Area scheme was introduced after the 2nd World War to help keep the wide ranging naval communications system in use. It also enabled the low power transmitters then fitted to the majority of merchant ships to still provide world wide coverage, by using the Naval communications systems fitted at a number of important British naval bases around the world. It gave a relatively high loading for the naval system, and maintained the skills of the staff.

The world was split into areas. Each of these areas contained at least one major naval communications station. This station would then receive and transmit traffic for ships within its area. The station for area A for instance was the Post Office long range station, Portishead Radio in England, which covered virtually the whole of the North Atlantic down to the Equator. Although Portishead was not naval, it was the starting and ending point for most messages destined to or from the UK. It was run by the British Post Office, and was a very efficient and powerful station. The South Atlantic was covered by Cape Town and the Indian Ocean by Mauritius. Singapore and Hongkong covered the Western Pacific, while Wellington was responsible for the Eastern side. A number of smaller area stations were also used if the big ones could not be contacted due to conditions, or if they were busy. All ships using the system would send regular position reports to their respective area stations, so the system would know where each ship's traffic should be addressed. These position reports could also be used to find the approximate position of the ship in case of any loss of contact: the last position report, course and speed giving a point of reference for any search.

As more ships were fitted with better, more powerful, equipment, and also due to the gradually increasing operating costs and reduction of naval facilities, the area scheme was finally phased out. For British registered ships, the service was free of charge, but foreign ships had to pay to use it.

I became quite adept at picking the right frequencies and times for optimum radio propagation to various parts of the world. It was a challenge to make a direct contact with the UK, and not have to use the relay system too often. It did often mean, however, that I had to get up at God forsaken times to send my traffic. My official duty time was 8 hours, but I would often be there 10 or even 12 trying to clear messages or waiting my turn in long frustrating queues, - only perhaps to find that the station faded out just before my turn came!

One other disadvantage of the "modern" all aft ship was the aerials. They were short, almost wrapped around the funnel, and rather low over the deck. Their efficiency was considerably reduced due to the proximity to large earthed metal objects – like the funnel. The funnel exhaust gases led to corrosion, and soot caused insulation problems. Again, this was part of the new design, allowing the antennas to be kept rigged in port. Prior to this, I had worked on ships where the antenna was often the full length of the ship and as high as the mainmast. In tankers they could be left up, but cargo ships had to lower the antennas to work cargo, and re-hoist them on sailing. This took time, and frequently led to problems of kinking and breakage. The deck crew were not aerial riggers, and had often to be instructed on how the aerial should be put up correctly.

Modern ships tended to have higher transmitter powers, which offset to some extent the poorer antennas. The higher power, however, brought with it other problems concerning high voltage leakage and arc-over, especially on the MF (500 KHz) frequencies. Here, the smaller antennas were only a fraction of a wavelength long and hence possessed a high impedance, causing very high voltages to be generated. Being aft, over the engine and propeller, meant also that vibration was a problem not only for the crew but also for the electronics.

Noise and vibration levels were always considerably higher than with amidships accommodation, and particularly so when the ships were in ballast. The screw was then often partially out of the water and unbalanced. I have known a ship to vibrate so much when going full astern, manoeuvring in ballast, that the radar scanner on the top of the main mast, sheared off its mounting bolts and was catapulted over the side. Sometimes transmitting antennas break as the mast sways backwards and forewords several feet, and I had to ensure all wire antennas had a certain amount of slack in them because of this. All electronics on the bridge and in the radio room were mounted on shock and vibration absorbers. Even so, screws and fastenings becoming loose was a problem requiring regular maintenance on all aft accommodation ships.

The vibration became such a part of everyday life that even when deeply sleep, any engine stoppage was immediately registered and one woke up at once. One became used to the clinking and jangling in the saloon as knives and forks, glasses, cups and plates vibrated in tune to the throb of the propeller. The panting noise of the engine exhaust became a part of the background, and one could tell at once if “Doris” was sick, and her pulse or breathing changed.

We mainly loaded scrap iron on the US East Coast for South Korea or Japan, then sailed in ballast across the North Pacific to Vancouver for packaged timber back to the U.S. East Coast again. The ballast trip across the Pacific was anything but peaceful – especially in winter, but we had a nice long stay in Vancouver and Victoria which used to make up for it. In the US we were often berthed in Brooklyn, a rather rough area of New York. It was said, that wandering around in a group was supposed to be fairly safe, but it was here that a group of us (I think about five) were nearly mugged whilst walking to our favourite bar. Luckily the group of youths who tried it were somewhat drunk, and we could run faster than they did. All the same, it was a rather unpleasant experience.

The scrap iron cargo was loaded using huge magnets either from heaps ashore, or straight from railway wagons parked alongside. (God knows what the magnets did to the magnetic compass! I looked once, and it was swinging wildly.) The scrap was picked up with the magnet hung on a large shoreside (or sometimes our own) crane, and swung over the ships holds. The current to the magnet was then turned off, and several tons of scrap crashed to the floor of the hold below, shaking the entire ship! It was dirty, noisy and rather slow loading, but at least we had time to see the sights. Then followed a lengthy trip down the US coast, into the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal, and the long, lonely haul across the Pacific.

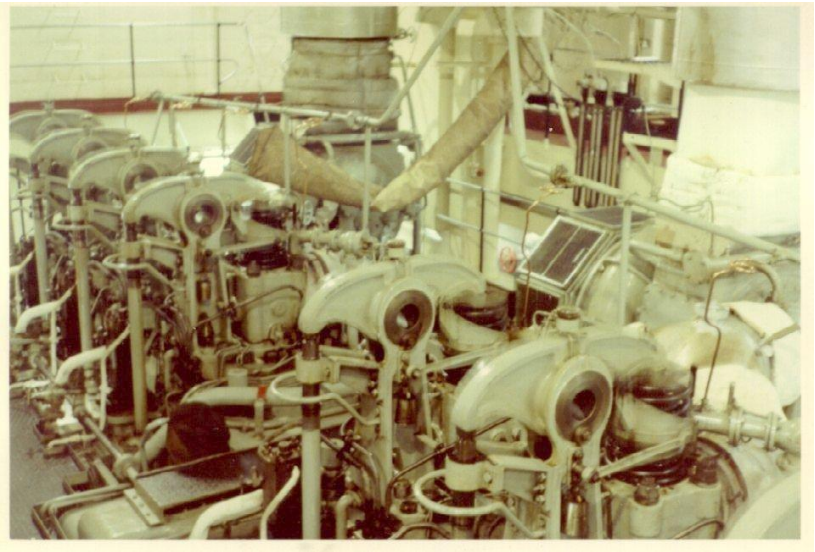
In South Korea (Pusan) the scrap was discharged by hand. This was a very slow undertaking, as it all had to be disentangled, put into slings and swung over onto the jetty into waiting trucks. We had a large workforce of labourers aboard to do this. The workers were frisked on leaving the ship to check they were not smuggling ball bearings ashore. These apparently could be sold off to garages and re-used. The scrap was destined for the steel works, where it was melted down and used amongst other things, to make new cars and ships.

It used to take over a month to complete discharge, so we had lots of time to go ashore. I met a Korean Army interpreter and he was delighted at being able to practise his English with a real Englishman. He had a lot of trouble with the Americans, but could understand me perfectly. I was taken to a Korean army base where I had to convince his superior officers that their interpreter could in fact understand English! I was introduced to his English Professor at the Pusan University, and to some of his student friends, as well as some of the sights, sounds and customs of South Korea. I was invited by a number of families to their homes for meals and was generally made very welcome. He and I also made a quite a number of bus trips with friends to some of the beaches, temples and markets around the area. Without him, I would never have known where to go or how to get there.

Another Korean adventure was when I came back from ashore one evening. The two wives on board had also been ashore shopping. Inside the dock area, they were apparently molested by some soldiers. The docks were regularly patrolled by the military to stop pilfering and a possible "invasion" by the North Koreans. This last being the reason that right next to where we were berthed, was an anti-aircraft gun, manned 24 hours a day!

The wives had gone to the dock army commander's office, but he didn't want to speak English, and was becoming difficult. It was getting dark, and they were starting to become upset too. I came back just then, heard about the situation and started to run back to the ship to get reinforcements. It was at least a mile, and I was somewhat puffed when an army patrol saw me, and thinking I was up to something, challenged me. An army rifle has an enormous hole at the front when looked at from the wrong end, so I quickly stopped! Luckily they relaxed after seeing my pass, and let me continue. They could speak virtually no English, and I of course no Korean, so it's just as well I had the bit of paper. A whole troop of us from the ship returned to the army commander's office. He let the wives go, but we never did find out who it was that molested them. We think it was some soldiers after their shopping. The army pay was very small, and a little pilfering was not exceptional.

I have often read of people throwing the alarm clock across the room to stop it ringing. On this ship it actually happened to me. Sleeping the sleep of the just, the very tired or just the plain intoxicated, I dreamt the alarm clock was ringing for me to start watch. Blearily I reached out and pressed the button to stop it. It was still ringing! I pressed again, harder. It was still ringing! I was by now becoming a bit angry so I hit the button with my fist. No effect, if anything it seemed to get louder. At last I picked up the offending instrument, and threw it as hard as I could against the bulkhead. It was STILL ringing! Now I belatedly realised it was not the clock that was ringing, it was the auto alarm bell on the bulkhead! Stumbling upstairs to the radio room, I saw the angry red eye of the alarm winking at me and pressed the reset button, ahh, Blessed Silence! The Chief Officer poked his head enquiringly into the radio room through the bridge hatch as I carefully listened to the 500 KHz distress frequency. All I could hear was the heavy, almost continuous, crashes of static from Pacific Ocean thunderstorms. After nearly half an hour and a cup of coffee from the bridge, I surmised a false alarm, triggered by static. It sometimes happens. After entering up the log and resetting the auto-alarm watch, I trundled down to my cabin and tried to resuscitate my clock. It wouldn't speak to me any more (understandably, I suppose), so I buried it at sea with full honours the next day. Luckily I had a spare.



This ship had a 7 cylinder diesel engine arranged in two blocks (4 cylinders + turbocharger and 3 cylinders + turbocharger). One day, during a passage through the Japanese Islands to Korea, one of the turbo blowers seized solid. These are large fans, driven by the exhaust gases, which blow pressurised air into the engine cylinders to increase power and efficiency.
I was standing near the engine room skylights at the time, admiring the impressive scenery, and witnessed it all. Suddenly there was a horrible screeching noise of tortured metal from the engine room, together with lots of thick black smoke from funnel. It didn't sound at all nice – actually, rather expensive! The rotors of these turbo units weigh a ton or more, revolve at speeds of around 10,000 RPM and operate at near red hot temperatures. (Its not unknown for them to "throw a blade", - a turbine blade breaks loose under the terrific stresses of speed and heat - then punctures through the metal casing and imbeds itself into the nearest solid object, frequently destroying anything it happens to touch on the way. The rotor is then unbalanced, and the vibration consequently causes it to destroy itself and anything around it at it tears itself apart. They are extremely loud, and not very pleasant things to have to work next to). In this case we lucky and it didn't do anything nasty, just stopped suddenly with melted bearings and a very nasty noise. Marine engineers are pretty clever at fixing most things, but this was beyond their power. We anchored in the middle of the fairway until the engineers had the 4 units served by this turbo charger blocked off, i.e. preventing fuel reaching the affected cylinders. We could continue to run slowly on 3 cylinders.

On being told what had happened, the Japanese coastguard informed us via 500 KHz W/T "You cannot anchor there". We said "We just have... what you going to do about it? - we cannot move". The next question was predictably "Do you want a tug?" to which we replied "No". There was then a baffled silence from the Japanese coastguard station as they tried to work out how they could get us to move without us or them "losing face". The end result was that they remained silent. We got moving again a few hours later, after both I and the coastguard had broadcast navigational warnings to all ships, saying that we were anchored in the fairway, and please would they try not to bump into us. We ran on "3 legs" until a spare blower arrived later in Korea. (a very slow trip) Puff-puff-puff...puff-puff-puff. It sounded a bit like an asthmatic steam engine.

I had read about and experienced many Eastern customs, but I had my first experience of the Japanese "Kamakazi" tactics of fishing boats trying to touch our ship when we were transiting the Japanese Inland Sea. This was actually a very beautiful area, being studded with many small islands with steep wooded slopes. Some of these islands had wonderful temples and picturesque light houses on outcrops and peninsulas. We had to keep to the authorised channels for big ships, the fishing boats however seemed to be able to travel anywhere at will. We were literally almost rammed at high speed by a dozen or so Japanese fishing vessels, many with eyes pained on their bows, as their crews tried to touch us. It was an unnerving experience. Apparently, this was supposed bring them good luck. I guess it works on the assumption of "if I don't get sunk now, I won't during this

next fishing trip"! It nearly drove our pilot insane. He used to stand on the bridge wing waving his arms about and shouting Japanese obscenities at the fishermen. I presume they were obscenities - I didn't really understand them, but they sounded pretty graphic!

On arrival at the US East Coast port of Baltimore, we became involved in the big US Longshoremen's strike which had just started. This virtually paralysed some Eastern seaboard ports for months. There were hundreds of ships anchored all over waiting to get in. We were anchored about 6 miles off Baltimore for 4 months. No shore leave was allowed as we had not officially arrived, and not been cleared by customes or immigration. Towards the end, we were heartily fed up with it all. I managed to get a very old American TV set I found in a locker to work. The tube was low emission, so we had to sit in near darkness to watch the dim blurred picture. I had it in my cabin, so a group of us used to meet there with a few beers. It was about the only thing that kept us sane.

By the sound of the bridge VHF R/T, a number of people had already gone over the edge. It sounded like a menagerie at times. hoots, bleats, moos and grunts could be heard from bored and fed up watchkeepers. The coastguard radio station tried to keep order, but it was nearly hopeless. One offender was one we called "the phantom squelcher". A voice would come over the air in heavily accented German or Swiss English "Pliss, I Vish to test my sqveltch" over and over again. (For information, the squelch on a VHF radio was the noise muting circuit, designed so that when no signal was being received, the receiver is completely silent.)

Early one morning while here at anchor, I woke up to a loud bang which even seemed to rock the ship. At first I thought someone had shot the Captain! (You must remember I was still half asleep and maybe had been dreaming. He was also not the most popular man on board). On investigating however, I found his door locked, so surmised he was probably still ok. My cabin was next to his on the same deck so I did not have far to go. I next heard the engine room door open and close a few times, but that was not so unusual. The lights were still on and all remained quiet. Then I smelt a bit of smoke which got me a bit worried, but there were no alarms, and it too died away. After a while, when nothing more untoward happened, I went back to sleep. The next morning I found out that the "donkey" (auxiliary) boiler from which we got our heating, and which also pre-heated the fuel oil, had exploded. It had boiled dry. A safety cut-out had not operated, and the watch engineer had done exactly the wrong thing in trying to re-fill it with water when it was still red hot! (He could very well have been still half drunk after an all night session in the bar combating boredom and frustration). No one was hurt, but the boiler was so much junk. What was worse, we had no heating. It became pretty cold, but luckily it was not mid winter and we survived until the boiler was rebuilt with spares from ashore.

Another, more pleasant experience whilst at anchor was being the best man for the 3rd engineers wedding. He married a Canadian girl,(a Canadian Indian chief's daughter!), and they had planned to get married in Vancouver, but seeing as we were delayed so long, she flew to Baltimore from Vancouver. They were married in a church ashore, and the reception was held on board the ship. His fellow engineers had made him a beautiful sword for a present, which was used to cut the cake with. A lovingly polished steel blade and gleaming brass handle. His new wife then travelled with us until we arrived back at Vancouver again.

We loaded packaged timber at Vancouver and Victoria for the American East Coast via the Panama Canal. This took quite some time, and we had ample time to sample the delights of shoreside life again. Whilst out walking ashore, I knocked on the door of a house with a large antenna on it. My Amateur Radiointerest has opened many doors, and this was one of them. I was made very welcome, and introduced to quite a number of Victoria's sizeable Amateur Radiopopulation. In return, I used to get them aboard and show them around. Many were very impressed by the sheer size, power and complexity of a modern ocean going ship, even this relatively simple one. I in turn was often taken for wonderful sightseeing trips around the area, to barbeques and family meals. The area made a very deep impression on me, and I still think that Vancouver Island is a wonderful place to live.
When fully loaded, which took several weeks and also several ports, we headed for the Panama Canal and the American East Coast.

When berthing to load a timber cargo at Victoria, after a very pleasant two week dry-docking at Esquimalt, just around the corner, the propeller hit a tree trunk. It was really a pilot error and not our fault at all, but as always, the Captain takes the can! We were being taken out of the dry-dock, and were due to berth just around the point. The pilot decided it was not necessary to ballast down. This would have taken extra time, and another ship was waiting to enter the dock. He took us out, and whilst trying to berth us, the wind got up and started to blow us broadside between the dock and the harbour wall. Light ship, the ship’s side was like a huge sail. The 4 small tugs we had been allocated could not cope. The propeller was half out of the water and thus gave little thrust. The pilot ordered an emergency full astern, which caused a huge vortex around the stern, and lots of flying spray. It did not otherwise seem to have much effect, and by adding a turning moment to the ship’s movement, made things worse. The vortex between the quay and the ships side caused a large tethered tree trunk used as a buffer, to break its chain and to be sucked down. It jammed itself between the propeller and the hull. The engine stopped after a few seconds of terrible vibration and some very expensive sounding noises.
We were now completely helpless, and drifting rapidly into a position where we would become tightly wedged. Finally, after some frantic calls by the pilot on the VHF, a few more tugs materialised just in time, and managed to turn us and put us alongside.

We all trooped on to the quayside and looked at the propeller. The bit we could see did not look too good. The engineers apprehensively put the turning gear into action to turn the propeller slowly. To everyone’s surprise, it actually still worked! We could see however that the propeller was quite badly bent, one blade especially so. We certainly could not sail like that.

As it turned out, the engine was damaged as well, but not enough to need major repairs. This was Captain "Tikketys" last ride! He was nick-named that as he had a habit of calling out "Is everything tikketyboo"? when he saw us. He drank like a fish. Gin mostly. A bottle a day was normal. When approaching harbour he added a second bottle and became unreadable in both

verbal and written communications! He flew home from Victoria, on his way to retirement, and a new Captain took us to sea.

The ship never ran as smoothly after that though, even after the dry-dock did a wonderful job of straightening out our bent propeller. To do this they carefully ballasted the ship right down by the head whilst alongside the quay, to bring the propeller out of the water entirely. The bow was almost under water at this point. They then brought in lots of acetylene torches to heat up the bent sections, and straightened them with hammers and lots of muscle power. It took several days but was easier and cheaper than bringing the ship back into drydock and removing the propeller completely. The chief engineer thought the engine had been put out of balance by the sudden stop. An engine weighing several hundred tons, moving at around 125 RPM cannot stop suddenly without something giving way. Probably the crankshaft webs had moved slightly, as they are only a shrink fit on the shaft itself, and the weight of the pistons would have put tremendous stress on them. The tree trunk was pulled out by a tug. It had a huge chunk bitten out of it by the propeller, but was re-tethered to the dock wall and may even be still there for all I know.

Probably nearly everyone has had experience of being knocked about by waves at the seaside. That these waves can sometimes have an awesome power and unpredictability was brought home to me by one somewhat unpleasant experience aboard this ship whilst in the North Pacific. One day a huge wave knocked the ship over on its side, and threw me clean out of the radio room chair and over to the other side of the bridge about 10 metres away without even touching the floor. I didn't even need wings! The weather was a little rough at the time but not unduly so, and I had wedged myself in firmly. My feet were on an open drawer and my back against the transmitter. This way I did not have to brace myself all the time against the ships motion, and could relax.

I was quietly reading, and listening to the immense silence of the 500 KHz distress and calling frequency in mid Pacific during daylight. Suddenly, without any warning, I was catapulted out of my seat, over the drawer and was airborne! I flew through the (luckily open) radio room door and remember a quick view of a very surprised and somewhat apprehensive 2/O on the bridge, arms wrapped around a stanchion, and his feet clear of the floor. I did a complete summersault and landed on my back at the other side of the chartroom, against the door leading down to the next deck. Luckily this was closed, otherwise I would have gone down a deck too. I was showered with everything moveable in the chartroom, books, charts, stools, pens, pencils and even the bridge kettle ended up on or around me. The ship shuddered and groaned mightily and hung poised on her beam ends. I honestly thought she would not recover, but was powerless to do anything about it.

Quite honestly, I cannot remember being frightened. I think I was more surprised than anything else, and everything seeming to run in slow motion. After what seemed like years (but probably was no longer than 30 seconds), the ship started to roll back. It was only afterwards, when I had extricated myself from the debris around me, that I started to think about what might have happened. I think we were very close to the point of no return (the point at which the ship just continues to roll over and obviously sink). We had rolled more than 45 degrees as documented by the inclinometer on the bridge. It could not register more than 45 degrees, and was hard over! This was an example of a sequence of freak waves, much larger than the rest, hitting us on the beam. We were very lucky that we had no moveable cargo, otherwise we would almost certainly have turned over, due to it shifting. There would have been no chance to send a distress message, the ship would have just disappeared without trace, probably within a few tens of seconds, another statistic at Lloyds. I am sure that quite a number of mysterious disappearances of well found ships

can be put down to such things. They belong to one of the known but totally unpredictable forces of the sea.

The North Pacific in winter can be extremely unfriendly and totally unforgiving. Next perhaps to the Southern Ocean, it probably has some of the worst weather in the world. We once received a weather warning from a ship not too far from us, reporting "phenomenal seas" meaning 20 metres or more. We had our own troubles, but at least never had to endure that. I cannot say if that ship survived or not. In such weather, a ship could just disappear without trace. We were virtually hove to, trying to ride it out. Going to anyone's rescue in that weather would have been totally out of the question. After days of heavy pounding it becomes very difficult to do anything much more than hang on. The incessant movement is very tiring, and we are all just waiting for the weather to improve. Normal deck work is impossible, and even the simplest of jobs become fraught with danger. A slip or a careless handhold meaning at least bruises, if not something more serious. Everything must be tied down and secured, or it finds its lowest point automatically – maybe not always in the same condition as it started out!

Despite all the problems it caused, I do not remember any of us regarding the sea as an enemy or something to be conquered. The story books may give that impression, but professional seamen regard bad weather merely as a hindrance to keeping up a schedule, and something to be very careful about if they are not to suffer damage to the ship (or themselves). We avoided it if we could, if not, we prepared for it as well as possible, and ploughed through. I think that we all asked ourselves the same question though – what the heck are we doing out here – and why? The ship rises and falls sometimes 20 metres at a time, around twice a minute for days on end. It can vibrate and shake violently when the bow is buried and the screw almost out of the water. All the drawers fall out and cupboards fly open, spewing all personal clothes and belongings on the cabin deck. It generally gets left there until the weather calms down. It can't fall any further! It is difficult to eat – even if one had much of an appetite, and after a week we are all pretty exhausted with little sleep, constant pounding and movement and no chance to really relax. Even on a large ocean going ship, its no fun being in an Atlantic or Pacific storm.

We had a potentially serious Engine room fire aboard this ship. I was awoken around 2am by alarm bells ringing, and the engine had stopped. I thought at first it was my Auto alarm, but I quickly realised, these bells were ringing outside my cabin. They were the ship's fire alarm. My emergency station was in the radio room, where I warmed everything up ready for any quick shout for help, and still not fully aware of what was burning, or where. Enquiring on the bridge, I found out it was something burning in the engine room. I went quickly outside and was quite surprised to see the engine room skylights were still open. In event of fire these are closed so the engine room can be flooded with Carbon Dioxide to smother the flames. I looked down and could see 6 foot (2 meter) flames bursting up from what looked like a main engine exhaust line, together with lots of smoke. People were running around with breathing equipment and frantically cutting away the burning insulation. Within a few minutes, the worst was

over, there was still smoke, but no more flames, and shortly after, the engine was started again. Apparently a lubricating oil pressure guage had stripped its threads, and blown off. Hot lubricating oil had sprayed over the exhaust insulation, which due to the almost red hot exhaust pipes underneath quickly burst into flame. It could have been very serious indeed, as close by were our "ready to use" fuel tanks, containing around 100 tons of fuel oil. In this case, quick action and training proved sufficient to prevent a major catastrophe

We even had a stowaway once. It was when we left Korea for Japan. Many Koreans wanted to work in Japan as pay and conditions were better, and jobs in Korea were not easy to find. We had just left Ulsan a few hours behind us, when a stranger appeared and asked one of our crew for a cigarette. He was immediately taken to the Captain, who promptly turned the ship around and gave the luckless passenger back to the authorities in Korea. He was actually very lucky not to have been killed. He had hidden in one of our empty cargo holds. An hour or so later, the hatches would have been locked, and some holds filled with water as ballast. For stability, flooded holds are pressed up to the very top with water. Anyone inside would most certainly drown. If we had not taken him back to Korea, we would possibly have been stuck with him on board for months. He would not have been allowed ashore in Japan without documents, and the ship would have been held responsible for him. Such people have sometimes had to stay aboard ships for a year or more, being unwelcome wherever the ship goes, and unable to go ashore anywhere.

I stayed on this ship for a total of 14 months. I liked the run and the long periods in port, even if the lengthy sea voyages were a bit boring, and the winter passages somewhat unpleasant. I had made many friends in Victoria B.C. and we all got on well on board. Even though I had had enough, and wanted to go home after this time, it was still quite an emotional leaving. The ship and the people on it become a very close knit community where we all have to work as a team and help each other. The ship is our home, and we all share the same difficulties and live and play in close proximity to each other. It is something the landsman very rarely experiences.

There are of course disagreements, and there are also times when we are heartily sick of each other. By and large however, seamen have learned to have a large tolerance, and it takes quite a lot to get them really upset. When they do get really upset though, watch out! There are no half measures.